

Draft Environmental Assessment

for Turkey Hunting, Expanded Archery Hunting for White-Tailed Deer, and Expanded Sport Fishing on Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge

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Prepared by

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Draft Environmental Assessment for Turkey Hunting, Expanded Archery Hunting for White-Tailed Deer and Expanded Sport Fishing on Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge

Date: February 24, 2020

This draft Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared to evaluate the effects associated with this proposed action and complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500–1509) and Department of the Interior (43 CFR 46; 516 DM 8) and United States (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) (550 FW 3) regulations and policies. NEPA requires examination of the effects of proposed actions on the natural and human environment.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Proposed Action

The Service is proposing to open hunting opportunities for wild turkey on Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River in accordance with State of Montana seasons and regulations (Figure 1). In addition, the refuge would be open for limited entry opportunity hunting for wild turkeys on designated areas of the refuge east of the Bitterroot River. White-tailed deer hunting would be expanded to include archery hunting on 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River. The use of Deer B License 260-20 (either sex white-tailed deer) would also be allowed on the refuge beginning in September 2020. Sport fishing would be opened on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River. This EA and companion hunting and fishing Plan (USFWS 2020a) is in accordance with the comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) completed by the Service in 2012 (USFWS 2012).

This proposed action is often iterative and may evolve during the NEPA process as the agency refines its proposal and gathers feedback from the public, tribes, and other agencies. Therefore, the final proposed action may be different from the original. The proposed action will be finalized at the conclusion of the public comment period for the EA.

1.2 Background

National wildlife refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), the purposes of an individual refuge, Service policy, and laws and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (NWRSAA), as amended by the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act), Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

The refuge was established on December 10, 1963 by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission using the authority of the 1929 Migratory Bird Conservation Act to approve the acquisition of 2,700 acres in 18 tracts to establish the Ravalli NWR. In 1978, the refuge was renamed to honor the late Senator Lee Metcalf, who was instrumental in establishing this refuge, and to recognize his lifelong commitment to conservation. On February 4, 1964, the first purchase was made, Tract 21, consisting of 408.05 acres. Over the next 25 years, the Service purchased another 23 tracts for a total of 2,799.52 refuge acres.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge

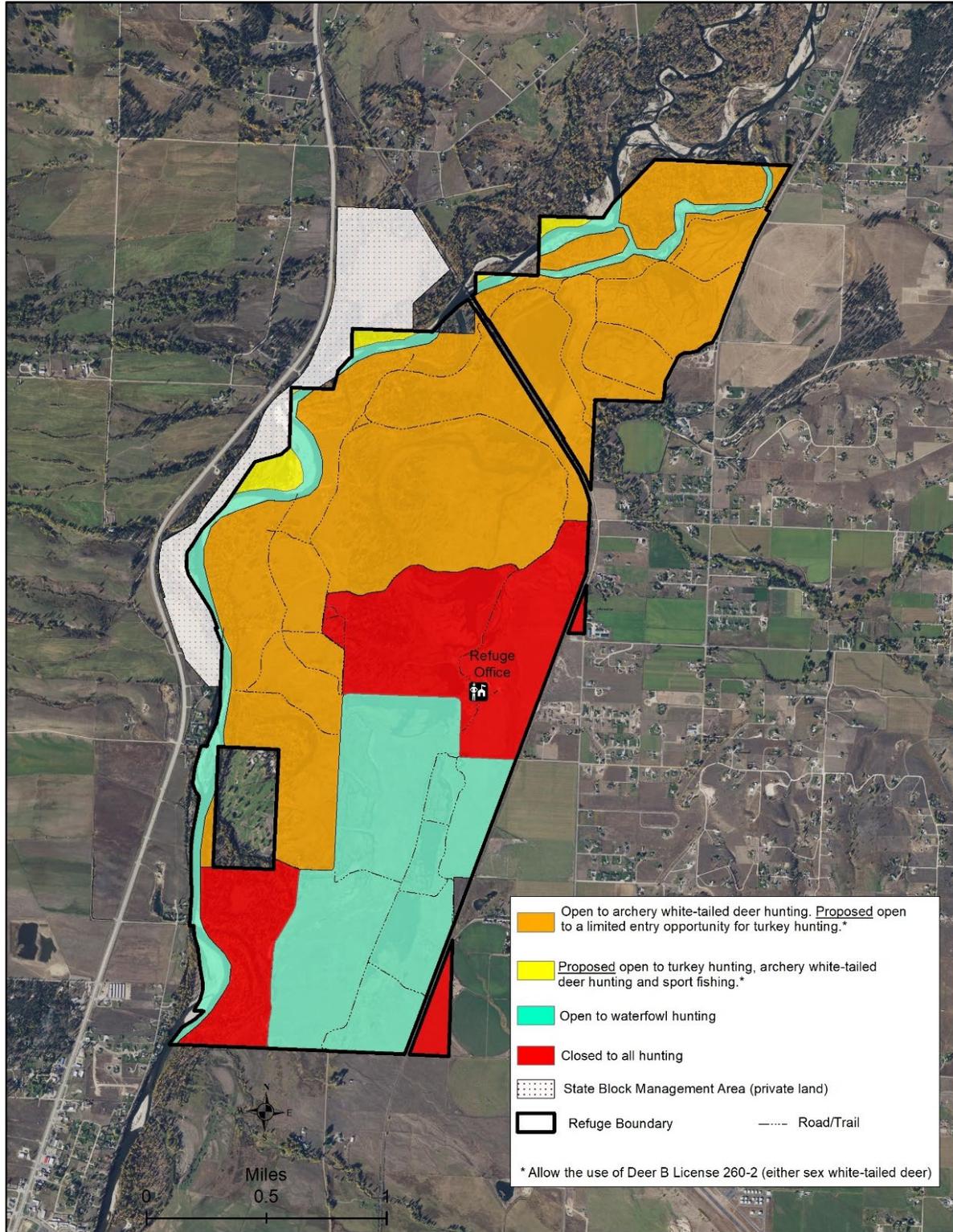


Figure 1. Proposed and Current Hunting and Fishing Opportunities on Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge.

The primary purpose of the refuge is to provide a feeding and resting area for migrating waterfowl in a locality where sanctuary is needed.

The mission of the Refuge System, as outlined by the NWRSA, as amended by the Improvement Act (16 U.S. Code 668dd et seq.), is:

“ . . . to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. ”

1.3 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of this proposed action is to provide compatible wildlife dependent recreational opportunities on Lee Metcalf NWR. The need of the proposed action is to meet the Service’s priorities and mandates as outlined by the NWRSA to “recognize compatible wildlife dependent recreational uses as the priority general use of the Refuge System” and “ensure that opportunities are provided within the Refuge System for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses” (16 U.S. Code 668dd(a)(4)).

The NWRSA mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the Refuge System to (16 U.S. Code 668dd(a)(4)):

- ensure that the mission of the Refuge System described at 16 U.S. Code 668dd(a)(2) and the purposes of each refuge are carried out;
- recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority public uses of the Refuge System through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife;
- ensure that opportunities are provided within the Refuge System for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses.

Therefore, it is a priority of the Service to provide for wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, including hunting and fishing, when these opportunities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the Refuge System.

The refuge hosts approximately 240,000 public use visits per year, most of which are not associated with hunting or fishing. The refuge currently hosts waterfowl hunting on 654 acres and white-tailed deer archery hunting on 2,275 acres. These hunts have been in place for many years. There are approximately 965 waterfowl-hunting visits and 1,030 deer-hunting visits per year. These represent approximately less than 1 percent of refuge visits each year.

Designated fishing sites are located in the wildlife-viewing area and include Francois Slough and the Bitterroot River shoreline. There are no boat launches within the refuge. However, people can float and fish the part of the Bitterroot River that passes through the refuge, but they must remain below the high watermark and must not access the refuge from the river. It is difficult to obtain an exact count on the number of anglers. In recent years, fishing seems to be less popular within the wildlife-viewing area and Francois Slough.

The refuge is managed to separate public uses to reduce the impact of consumptive users on non-consumptive user groups. Although disturbance to wildlife does occur with the hunt program, reducing this disturbance provides for wildlife viewing and photography opportunities.

2.0 Alternatives

2.1 Alternatives Considered

Alternative A – Open Hunting Opportunities for Wild Turkey, Expand Archery Hunting for White-Tailed Deer, and Expand Sport Fishing – Proposed Action Alternative

The Service is proposing to open hunting opportunities for wild turkey on the refuge on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River (Figure 1). In addition, the refuge would be open for limited entry opportunity hunting for wild turkeys on designated areas east of the Bitterroot River.

Hunting of white-tailed deer would be allowed on refuge lands west of the Bitterroot River. Private and public lands west of the river are currently open to white-tailed deer archery hunting, including a Block Management Area and two Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks fishing access sites. The Deer B licenses that are permitted to be used on the refuge would expand to include Deer B 260-20. Sport fishing would also be opened on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River. This EA and companion hunting and fishing plan (USFWS 2020a) is in accordance with the CCP completed by the Service in 2012 (USFWS 2012).

Alternative B – Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge Would Remain Closed to Turkey Hunting – No Action Alternative

The refuge would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting would continue on designated areas of the refuge (as described in 50 CFR 32.45, <http://gov.ecfr.io>). Sport Fishing would continue on designated areas of the Refuge (as described in 50 CFR 32.45).

3.0 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

3.1 Affected Environment

Lee Metcalf NWR consists of 2,799.52 acres (4.37 square miles) in Ravalli County, Montana next to the Bitterroot River and just north of the town of Stevensville (Figure 1).

The refuge is composed of 1,186 acres of uplands (primarily tame grasses), 502 acres of woodlands and wetlands near woodlands, 958 acres of wetland impoundments (open water, emergent vegetation), 62 acres of river channel, and 89 acres of bare or sparse vegetation. The proposed action is located west of the Bitterroot River and east of Highway 93 in a mixed river bottom habitat.

Tables 1 through 6 provide brief descriptions of each resource affected by the proposed action.

For more information regarding the affected environment, please see Chapter 3 of the refuge's CCP, which can be found here: www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/refuges/completedPlanPDFs_FL/lmc_ccp_2_refuge.pdf.

3.2 Environmental Consequences of the Action

This section analyzes the environmental consequences of the action on each affected resource, including direct and indirect effects. This EA covers the written analyses of the environmental consequences on a resource only when the impacts on that resource could be more than negligible and therefore considered an “affected resource” or are otherwise considered important

as related to the proposed action. Any resources that would not be more than negligibly affected by the action and have been identified as not otherwise important as related to the proposed action have been dismissed from further analyses.

Tables 1 through 5 provide:

- a brief description of the affected resources in the proposed action area;
- impacts of the proposed action and any alternatives on those resources, including direct and indirect effects.

Table 6 provides a brief description of the anticipated cumulative impacts of the proposed action and any alternatives.

Impact Types:

- *Direct effects* are those that are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place.
- *Indirect effects* are those that are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance but are still reasonably foreseeable.
- *Cumulative impacts* result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions.

Table 1. Affected Natural Resources and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives.

<p style="text-align: center;">Affected Resources</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p><i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p><i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i></p>
<p>Species to be Hunted</p>		
<p><i>Wild Turkey</i></p> <p>Wild turkeys are not native to Montana and were introduced at various times to support hunting opportunities. According to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP), no population surveys are conducted on wild turkey in the Bitterroot Valley. Population surveys of wild turkeys are also not conducted on the refuge. Turkeys group in communal flocks during the winter and typically stay on private lands south of the refuge. By late spring, the winter flock has broken up with toms searching for hens in small groups that make their way north onto the refuge. Turkeys are also located on private lands west of the Bitterroot River. Some of these birds make their way east to the refuge lands in late spring.</p> <p><i>White-tailed Deer</i></p> <p>White-tailed deer surveys have not been conducted on the refuge since 2011. The average winter nighttime deer counts in 2011 were 93 deer. In 1989, the average winter nighttime deer counts were 377. In the past, MFWP conducted helicopter deer surveys in the Bitterroot Valley. Although not refuge-specific, the survey segment that encompassed the refuge covered the north end of the refuge, between the highways, and south to the Stevensville cutoff road.</p> <p>Data from this helicopter survey, which was last conducted in 2005, found 409 white-tailed deer. Data from the helicopter surveys for the survey segment that covered the refuge between 1988 and 2005 averaged 260 white-tailed deer.</p>	<p><i>Wild Turkey</i></p> <p>We, the Service, anticipate that up to 100 hunters would access the refuge to hunt turkeys annually. However, the number of turkeys that would be present on the refuge each year is expected to be highly variable depending on spring weather and habitat conditions. We, the Service, estimate that the annual turkey harvest on the refuge would be fewer than 20 and, in some years, may be zero. In some years, due to hunting pressure or spring conditions, turkeys may not be present on the refuge temporarily. However, given the small number of turkeys that may be harvested on the refuge, it is likely to have a negligible effect on the wild turkey population in the Bitterroot Valley, and these turkeys would be expected to repopulate the refuge in most years.</p> <p><i>White-tailed Deer</i></p> <p>Typically, there are more than 1,000 deer-hunting visits per year. Archers harvested 26 white-tailed deer on the refuge in 2018 and accrued 2,862 hunt hours in 942 archery hunt visits.</p> <p>We estimate that the added hunt pressure and harvest incurred by opening the areas of the refuge west of the Bitterroot River and by allowing the 260-20 tag to be used on the refuge would increase by 10 percent or less. This would be a minimal impact to the current white-tailed deer population on the refuge.</p>	<p>Under this alternative, the refuge would remain closed to turkey hunting, and white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would not be expanded. Thus, no impacts to wild turkeys would occur. Also, no added impacts to deer or sport fish would occur beyond the current refuge hunting and fishing programs.</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i>
<p><i>Sport Fish</i></p> <p>Fish species present on the refuge include Montana Brook Trout, Brown Trout, Bull Trout, Columbia Slimy Sculpin, Cutthroat Trout, Largemouth Bass, Largescale Sucker, Longnose Sucker, Mountain Whitefish, Northern Pike, Northern Pike Minnow, Peamouth, Pumpkinseed, Rainbow Trout, Redside Shiner, Slimy Sculpin, and Westslope Cutthroat Trout.</p>	<p><i>Sport Fish</i></p> <p>Although opening more areas on the west side of the Bitterroot River would provide new access for sport fishing, the new area that would be opened is only 2 percent of shoreline of the Bitterroot River. This is not expected to result in an increase in the overall number of anglers, fishing days, or fish caught. Therefore, the proposed action would not have any added impacts on sport fish as a result of the proposed action.</p>	
Wildlife and Aquatic Species		
<p>Riverfront woodlands and wetlands provide important nesting, foraging, and stopover habitat for many birds. These include neotropical songbirds such as the least flycatcher, yellow warbler, Vaux’s swift, and Lewis’s woodpecker, as well as waterbirds such as the common merganser and wood duck. Riverfront forest is also important for nesting and perching sites for large raptors such as bald eagles and ospreys. The most common reptiles are garter snakes. Mammals that use the riverfront forest include the northern river otter, mink, white-tailed deer, raccoon, beaver, muskrat, and yellow-pine chipmunk. There are 11 bat species found on the refuge, all of which depend on the gallery forest for various stages of their life cycles. Of these 11 species, 3 of them are state species of concern, including Townsend’s big-eared bat, hoary bat, and fringed myotis.</p> <p>Some of the more common wildlife species observed in the upland habitat are small mammals like the Columbian ground squirrel, meadow vole, American deer mouse, white-tailed deer, striped skunk, coyote, red fox, and American badger.</p>	<p>Turkey hunting may result in temporal disturbance in the area open to hunting. Turkey hunters are typically low impact, move very quietly and typically hunt during the morning. Occasional gunshots and hunting activity may displace some bird and mammal species.</p> <p>White-tailed deer archery hunting may also result in temporal disturbance to wildlife in the areas open to hunting.</p> <p>These impacts would be minimal, and we assume that displaced wildlife would reoccupy disturbed sites following hunter departure.</p>	<p>Under this alternative, the refuge would remain closed to turkey hunting, and white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would not be expanded. Thus, no added impacts to refuge wildlife or aquatic species would occur beyond the current refuge hunting and fishing program.</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i>
<p>Common reptile species include the terrestrial garter snake and common garter snake. Sandhill cranes have also been seen foraging in the upland fields. The abundance of small mammals in this habitat provides feeding opportunities for great blue herons and raptors, including the red-tailed hawk, rough-legged hawk, American kestrel, and prairie falcon. Upland habitats also provide browsing opportunities for white-tailed deer.</p> <p>Throughout the riparian woodlands are various wetland types, including ephemeral pools, sloughs, and remnants of former gravel pits that provide breeding grounds for amphibians such as the long-toed salamander and the boreal toad, a state species of concern. Native beavers, northern river otters, mink, muskrats, and Columbia spotted frogs. Nonnative American bullfrogs also inhabit these wetlands.</p>		
Threatened and Endangered Species and Other Special Status Species		
<p>We reviewed five species for possible impacts for the proposed action: Canada lynx, grizzly bear, North American wolverine, yellow-billed cuckoo, and bull trout (USFWS IPAC database, 2020b). None of these species has been documented on the refuge. A grizzly bear was trapped on White-Tailed Golf Course next to the refuge in 2018. Although yellow-billed cuckoos have not been documented on the refuge, appropriate habitat is present and there are records of the birds in the area north of the refuge in the Bitterroot Valley.</p> <p>A total of 42 wildlife state species of concern and 21 federal birds of conservation concern have been found in the Bitterroot Valley (USFWS 2012). There are also two plant species of concern found on or near the refuge, Guadalupe water nymph and shining flatsedge.</p>	<p>Canada lynxes, wolverines, and grizzly bears are wide-ranging species that could possibly move through the refuge but thus far have not been documented on the refuge. Yellow-billed cuckoos are only known in Montana in June and July during migration, which is outside of the months the proposed hunting opportunities would occur and are not known to occur on the refuge.</p> <p>Spring turkey hunting may result in temporal disturbance in the area open to hunting. Turkey hunters are typically low impact, move very quietly and typically hunt during the morning. Occasional gunshots and hunting activity could displace species of special concern. White-tailed deer archery hunting may also result in temporal disturbance to wildlife in the areas open to hunting.</p>	<p>Under this alternative, the refuge would remain closed to turkey hunting, and white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would not be expanded. Thus, no added impacts to endangered species, threatened species, or species of special concern would occur beyond the current refuge hunting and fishing programs.</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u>
<p>The state forest and grassland bird species of concern that have been recorded on the refuge are the peregrine falcon, black swift, burrowing owl, great gray owl, Lewis’s woodpecker, olive-sided flycatcher, Clark’s nutcracker, loggerhead shrike, black-and-white warbler, Le Conte’s sparrow, and bobolink. There are also three documented mammal state species of concern on the refuge: hoary bat, fringed myotis, and Townsend’s big-eared bat. The damselfly, boreal bluet, and boreal toad, an amphibian, are also species of concern that have been recorded on the refuge.</p> <p>The state wetland bird species of concern that have been recorded on the refuge are the common loon, American white pelican, American bittern, great blue heron, black-crowned night-heron, white-faced ibis, trumpeter swan, bald eagle, long-billed curlew, Franklin’s gull, black tern, common tern, Caspian tern, and Forster’s tern.</p>	<p><i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i></p> <p>These impacts would be minimal, and we assume that displaced wildlife would reoccupy disturbed sites following hunter departure.</p> <p>Expanding sport fishing is not expected to change the current numbers of people using the refuge to access fishing areas and therefore would not have any other impacts on bull trout as a result of the proposed action.</p>	<p><i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i></p>
Vegetation		
<p>Historically, vegetation in the Bitterroot River floodplain on the refuge covered seven distinct habitat and community types: (1) riverfront-type forest, (2) floodplain gallery-type forest, (3) persistent emergent wetland, (4) wet meadow herbaceous, (5) floodplain and terrace grassland, (6) saline grassland, and (7) grassland sagebrush.</p> <p>Gallery forest is located mostly on the western portion of the refuge, west and east of the river, between the riverfront forest and the wetland impoundments. This habitat is more closely associated with backwater and overbank flooding than with drier upland conditions.</p>	<p>Refuge vegetation is currently affected by the high level of public use (approximately 240,000 annual visitors), the high number of vehicles that already use the county road through the refuge, and the nonnative species that affect more than 70 percent of refuge lands. The proposed action would expand hunting and sport fishing on less than 3 percent of the refuge.</p> <p>Minimal disturbance or trampling of individual shrubs or grasses is expected as hunters and anglers navigate the newly opened area. Some compaction of soils may occur.</p>	<p>Under this alternative, the refuge would remain closed to turkey hunting, and white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would not be expanded. Thus, no added impacts to refuge vegetation would occur beyond the current refuge hunting, fishing, and other public use opportunities.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Affected Resources</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p><i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p><i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i></p>
<p>Dominated by mature black cottonwood and ponderosa pine, it is found on higher floodplain elevations with layers of Chamokane loams over underlying sands along natural levees and point bar terraces next to minor floodplain tributaries. Indicator tree and shrubs species for gallery forest include ponderosa pine with black cottonwood, along with an understory of large woody shrubs such as thin-leaved alder, river hawthorn, red osier dogwood, and Woods’ rose. There may also be mixed grasses such as bluebunch and fescue under and between trees and shrubs.</p> <p>Nonnative species are prolific on the refuge, displacing native plants and affecting more than 70 percent of refuge lands as a result of alterations to topography, drainages, clearing, conversion to various agricultural crops or livestock forage, grazing by cattle and sheep, and sedimentation pre- and post-establishment of the refuge. Many of the species are transported to the refuge as “hitchhikers” on vehicles, pedestrians, and animals. Wildfowl Lane, a county road that bisects the refuge, is used by more than 240,000 visitors annually in vehicles from all over the world. These factors have contributed to the introduction and distribution of invasive species, as have the surrounding development, landscape-level invasive species in western Montana, the vulnerable exposed soil on the refuge (from wetland habitat construction and prior agricultural uses), and the locations of the Bitterroot River, the railroad bed, Highway 93, and Eastside Highway.</p>	<p>If hunter- or angler-created trails develop from repeated trampling and compaction, the effects would be more moderate. Most impacts would be short-term, although excessive, repeated disturbance of the same area may cause moderate impacts in localized areas.</p> <p>Overall, more hunters and anglers accessing newly opened area would be expected to have minimal added impact on refuge vegetation.</p>	

Key: MFWP = Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; T&E = threatened and endangered

Note: The impacts to refuge soils, geology, air quality, water resources, wetlands, and floodplains are all considered to be nonexistent or negligible and have not been analyzed further.

Table 2. Affected Visitor Use and Experience and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives.

<p>Affected Resources</p>	<p><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p>	<p><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p>
<p>The refuge hosts approximately 240,000 public use visits per year, most of which are not associated with hunting. The refuge currently hosts waterfowl hunting on 654 acres and white-tailed deer archery hunting on 2,275 acres. These hunts have been in place for many years. There are approximately 965 waterfowl hunting visits and 1,030 deer hunting visits per year. These represent approximately less than 1 percent of refuge visits each year.</p> <p>The refuge is also popular as a fishing designation with approximately 920 fishing visits annually. Fishing is allowed on the Bitterroot River and North Burnt Fork Creek, known locally as Francois Slough, as it travels through the refuge.</p> <p>Opportunities for wildlife observation and photography are located at or along the following places: (1) the wildlife-viewing area, (2) visitor contact area, (3) Kenai Nature Trail, and (4) Wildfowl Lane, a county road that runs through the refuge. Visitors must follow refuge regulations to protect wildlife and their habitats while enjoying the opportunity to view and photograph them.</p> <p>The wildlife-viewing area is about 188 acres and has more than 5 miles of trails. One trail is designated as a National Recreation Trail, National Ice Age Trail, and Lewis and Clark Historical Trail.</p>	<p><i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i></p> <p>The refuge attempts to separate the various public uses as much as possible to reduce conflicts between user groups. Opening the areas of the refuge west of the Bitterroot River should not create conflict as much of the area near the refuge is already open to hunting and fishing. Increasing the license opportunity for archery white-tailed deer on the archery hunt area east of the river should not create any added conflict with other user groups. Opening turkey hunting may create some controversy with wildlife photographers and wildlife observers as they enjoy photographing and observing these birds, especially in the spring, when the toms are displaying.</p> <p>By limiting the opening to the west of the river and specifically designated areas east of the river, there should be ample opportunity for wildlife photographers and observers to still enjoy turkeys on the refuge in late spring. Expanding sport fishing to the west river area is not expected to change the current numbers of people using the refuge to access fishing areas and therefore would not have any added impacts on public use as a result of the proposed action.</p> <p>Overall, the proposed opening of the refuge to turkey hunting and expansion of white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would have a minimal impact on other public use opportunities on the refuge.</p>	<p><i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i></p> <p>Under this alternative, the refuge would remain closed to turkey hunting, and white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would not be expanded. Thus, no other impacts would occur beyond the current refuge hunting and public use opportunities. Visitor services programs and activities would continue as budgets and staffing levels allow.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Affected Resources</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p><i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p><i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i></p>
<p>The Kenai Nature Trail traverses different plant communities and the views differ from those in the wildlife-viewing area, offering visitors a different wildlife viewing experience.</p> <p>Wildfowl Lane is a Ravalli County road that travels almost 3 miles through the southern half of the refuge. This road loops through the refuge and connects at both ends to Eastside Highway. It is not an official auto tour route, but all refuge visitors use this road to access the refuge and view wildlife in the adjoining lands and wetland impoundments.</p> <p>On average, the refuge hosts 3,800 students annually. Students come from communities as far as Darby to the south and Ronan to the north. Most students are from grades 3 through 5.</p>		

Key: NWR = National Wildlife Refuge

Table 3. Affected Cultural Resources and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives.

<p style="text-align: center;">Affected Resources</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i></p>
<p>The Bitterroot Valley has a rich history and a dynamic culture. Before Euro-American settlement, the Salish people called this valley home for several centuries, and literature shows that there were several Salish campsites on the refuge. Within decades of the passage of Lewis and Clark through the Bitterroot Valley in 1805 and 1806, other Euro-Americans followed. In 1891, the U.S. Government relocated the Salish people to a reservation in the Jocko Valley. The arrival of Euro-American settlers forever changed the landscape and the uses of this valley from traditional harvesting of native plants and wildlife to intensive agriculture.</p> <p>The refuge does not have a complete inventory of cultural resources. However, the staff continue to work with the regional archaeologist and State Historic Preservation Office on a case-by-case basis to evaluate projects with the potential to cause impacts to cultural resources.</p>	<p>Due to the temporary and superficial use of refuge habitats during hunting and fishing activities, there should be no direct impacts to cultural resources under this alternative from visitors engaged in hunting and fishing activities, as delineated in the hunting and fishing plan.</p>	<p>Under this alternative, the refuge would remain closed to turkey hunting, white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would not be expanded, and no change would be made to existing environmental conditions. Subsequently, no direct or indirect impacts to cultural resources are anticipated under this alternative.</p>

Key: NWR = National Wildlife Refuge; U.S. = United States

Table 4. Affected Refuge Management and Operations and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives.

<p>Affected Resources</p>	<p><u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i></p>	<p><u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i></p>
<p>Administration</p>		
<p>Current staffing levels on the refuge include a refuge manager, maintenance worker and administrative assistant/ business team travel specialist who assists 13 other stations or programs throughout the region. The law enforcement officer is shared with the National Bison Range. There is no biologist or visitor service specialist.</p> <p>The refuge manager currently administers a waterfowl and archery deer hunt on the refuge and the public use program that accommodates approximately 240,000 yearly visits to the refuge.</p>	<p>Administering the hunting and fishing program would annually require staff time from the refuge manager, maintenance worker, administrative assistant, and refuge complex law enforcement officers to respond to hunter and angler inquiries; conduct hunter, angler, and visitor outreach; decrease conflicts among users; conduct law enforcement; maintain boundary posting and parking areas; repair hunt kiosks; maintain fishing platform, parking areas, waterfowl blinds, gates, and infrastructure; mow and grade roads and trails; observe impacts to wildlife, habitat, and visitor use; and ensure public safety.</p> <p>The refuge is part of the larger Western Montana NWR Complex (refuge complex). In 2019, the refuge complex hired two more law enforcement officers. Law enforcement officers are deployed to different locations within the refuge complex to ensure coverage during peak times. With the addition of the two new officers, we do not anticipate that the new hunting and fishing opportunities would have a significant impact on the refuge or the refuge complex as a whole.</p> <p>Access to the hunt areas would be from State Highway 93, and vehicle traffic on Luby Lane would not increase on the refuge. There may be increased access off and onto state Highway 93 and Luby Lane.</p>	<p>Under this alternative, the refuge would remain closed to turkey hunting, and white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would not expand. Thus, no other impacts to refuge administration would occur beyond the current refuge hunting and fishing program.</p>

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u>
	<p><i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i></p> <p>The annual cost of the refuge's proposed hunting program is estimated to be at least \$90,000. This cost covers staff and resources to provide public education, hunter assistance, enforcement, and maintenance and repair of hunting and fishing infrastructure.</p> <p>Because the opening of new hunting and fishing opportunities are not anticipated to attract significant numbers of new hunters, we anticipate that opening these areas would require significant staff time to manage. The overall impact to refuge administration would be minimal.</p>	<p><i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i></p>

Key: NWR = National Wildlife Refuge

Table 5. Affected Socioeconomics and Anticipated Direct and Indirect Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives.

Affected Resources	<u>Alternative A (Proposed Action)</u> <i>Hunting opportunities for wild turkey would be opened on Lee Metcalf NWR. Hunting of white-tailed deer would be expanded on the refuge, and sport fishing would also be expanded on approximately 40 acres west of the Bitterroot River.</i>	<u>Alternative B (No Action)</u> <i>Lee Metcalf NWR would remain closed to turkey hunting. Waterfowl and archery deer hunting, and sport fishing, would continue on designated areas of the refuge.</i>
Local and Regional Economics		
<p>The refuge is located in Ravalli County in southwestern Montana approximately 2 miles north of Stevensville. The County is 2,400 square miles with a population of 42,563. The recreational opportunities and natural beauty of this valley have made it one of the most rapidly expanding human population areas of Montana. The refuge is surrounded by development, including agriculture and housing. Thousands of people visit the nearby Bitterroot National Forest each year, and annually, the refuge has approximately 240,000 visitors.</p>	<p>Turkey and white-tailed deer hunting is currently permitted on lands near the refuge. The limited acres on the refuge that would be opened for turkey hunting and expanded for white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would probably not attract significant numbers of new hunters and is not expected to attract new anglers to the area. However, some local hunters may increase the number of times that they pursue turkey or white-tailed deer on the new areas and opportunities opened by the proposed action. This would result in a small positive economic impact to the area. No change in the amount of sport fishing is expected to occur.</p>	<p>Under this alternative, the refuge would remain closed to turkey hunting, and white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would not expand. Thus, no other impacts to refuge administration would occur beyond the current refuge hunting and fishing program.</p>
Environmental Justice		
<p>Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, requires all Federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their missions by finding and addressing disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs and policies on minorities and low-income populations and communities.</p>	<p>The Service has not identified any potential high and adverse environmental or human health impacts from this proposed action or any of the alternatives. The Service has identified no minority or low-income communities within the impact area. Minority or low-income communities would not be disproportionately affected by any impacts from this proposed action or any of the alternatives.</p>	<p>Same as the Proposed Action Alternative.</p>

Key: NWR = National Wildlife Refuge

3.3 Cumulative Impact Analysis

Cumulative impacts are defined as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions” (40 CFR 1508.7).

Table 4. Anticipated Cumulative Impacts of the Proposed Action and Any Alternatives.

Other Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Activity Impacting Affected Environment	Descriptions of Anticipated Cumulative Impacts
Wildlife	
<p><i>Wild Turkey, White-tailed Deer, Sport Fish</i></p>	<p>Wild Turkey MFWP does not perform formal surveys for turkeys, but all evidence points to continually expanding populations and a need to reduce numbers (Kuglin 2018). Turkeys are also one the most common game damage complaints received by MFWP. Therefore, if up to 20 more turkeys are harvested on the refuge each year, it is likely to have a negligible impact to the overall wild turkey population in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana. In addition, the small number of turkeys that may be harvested on the refuge would make a negligible contribution to the overall number of turkeys harvested on NWRs in Montana.</p> <p>White-tailed Deer Hunters harvest approximately 26 white-tailed deer on the refuge annually. This is not expected to increase by more than 10 percent with neither the expansion of approximately 40 more acres nor the use of the 260-20 tag. Therefore, expanding white-tailed deer archery hunting would have a negligible impact on the regional and statewide population of deer.</p> <p>Sport Fish Sport fishing is not expected to change the number of fish harvested by anglers and therefore would have no impact on the sport fish populations. By keeping adequate sanctuary on the refuge, wildlife learn to use the refugia and populations are sustained. Refuge signage, hunting/fishing and general brochures, informational kiosks, Web site postings, and state hunting and fishing regulations would also inform hunters and anglers of where and how the hunting and fishing program is managed to reduce overharvest of any wildlife population segment.</p>
Climate Change	
<p>Ecological stressors are expected to affect a variety of natural processes and associated resources into the future.</p> <p>Precipitation availability may have a large impact on the availability of wetlands and grasslands across the primary breeding grounds in the United States and Canada.</p>	<p>While the impacts from climate change on refuge wildlife and habitats are not certain, allowing hunting on the refuge would not add to the cumulative impacts of climate change. The refuge uses an adaptive management approach for its hunt program, annually monitoring (through direct feedback from state and local user groups) and reviewing the hunt program annually and revising annually (if necessary). The Service would adjust the hunt program as necessary to ensure that it does not contribute to the cumulative impacts of climate change on resident wildlife and migratory birds.</p>

Other Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Activity Impacting Affected Environment	Descriptions of Anticipated Cumulative Impacts
These habitat changes, if realized in the future, may reduce the amount and quality of both grassland and wetland for migratory birds that are hunted. As a result, wildlife would be displaced into other areas of available habitat.	

Key: MFWP = Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; NWR = National Wildlife Refuge

3.4 Monitoring

MFWP monitors big game populations as well as harvest and hunter activity annually for upland gamebirds. These are reported each year on the MFWP Web site. In addition, numbers of hunters and anglers, hunter and angler satisfaction, safety concerns, and potential environmental issues or conflicts with other wildlife-dependent public users would be evaluated annually to determine whether changes need to occur. Refuge staff would also coordinate annually with MFWP to discuss if any changes or adjustments are warranted.

3.5 Summary of Analysis

The purpose of this EA is to briefly provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement or a Finding of No Significant Impact.

Alternative A – Proposed Action Alternative

As described above, the proposed action alternative would open hunting opportunities for wild turkey and white-tailed deer, as well as more sport fishing access, on the Lee Metcalf NWR. We do not expect the direct impacts of turkey, white-tailed deer, or sport fish harvest on the refuge to have any population-level effects. Opening the refuge to more hunting and fishing would result in short-term disturbance to wildlife. These impacts would be minimal, and it is assumed that displaced wildlife would reoccupy disturbed sites following hunter or angler departure.

Opening the areas of the refuge west of the Bitterroot River and increasing the license opportunity for archery white-tailed deer on the archery hunt area east of the river should not create any added conflict with other user groups. Opening turkey hunting may create some controversy with wildlife photographers and wildlife observers as they enjoy photographing and observing these birds, especially in the spring, when the toms are displaying. By limiting the opening to the west of the river and specifically designated areas east of the river, there should be ample opportunity for wildlife photographers and observers to still enjoy turkeys on the refuge in late spring. Overall, the proposed opening of the refuge to turkey hunting and the expansion of white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing would have a minimal impact on other public use opportunities on the refuge.

This alternative meets the purpose and needs of the Service as described above because it provides hunting and fishing opportunities on the refuge and meets the refuge-establishing

purposes. The Service has the resources necessary to carry out this alternative and has determined that the proposed action described in this alternative is compatible with the purposes of the refuge and the mission of the Service (USFWS 2020c).

Alternative B – No Action Alternative

This alternative does not meet the purpose and needs of the Service as described above because it would not provide added hunting and fishing opportunities.

There would be no added costs to the refuge under this alternative. There would be no change to current public use and wildlife management programs on the refuge under this alternative. The refuge would not increase its impact on the economy and would not provide new hunting and fishing access opportunities. Although this alternative has the fewest direct impacts on physical and biological resources, it would not support our mandates under the NWRSA and Secretarial Order 3356.

3.6 List of Sources, Agencies, and Persons Consulted

The following agencies and organizations were consulted during the development of this EA:

- Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

3.7 List of Preparers

Name	Position	Work Unit
Tom Reed	Refuge Manager	Lee Metcalf NWR (Stevensville, MT)
Bob Johnson	Refuge Manager	Benton Lake NWR (Great Falls, MT)
Benjamin Gilles	Project Leader	Western Montana Complex (Great Falls, MT)
Vanessa Fields	Wildlife Biologist	Mountain-Prairie Regional Office (Lakewood, CO)
Allison Parrish	Zone Archeologist (MT/UT/WY)	Mountain-Prairie Regional Office (Bozeman, MT)

3.8 State Coordination

The refuge reviewed the operations and regulations for neighboring state wildlife management areas and refuges to find consistency where possible. We discussed opening the refuge west of the Bitterroot River for white-tailed deer archery hunting and turkey hunting and expanding the refuge archery white-tailed deer hunt to include the use of hunt license 260-20, with the MFWP Region 2 Bitterroot Valley wildlife biologist and Region 2 supervisor. This interest is congruent with the Department of Interior Secretarial Order 3356, “Hunting, Fishing, Recreational Shooting, and Wildlife Conservation Opportunities and Coordination with States, Tribes, and Territories.”

In the near future, we will send a letter and the draft EA to the state asking to coordinate with them to adjust the hunting and fishing plan to align, where possible, with state management goals. We will continue to consult and coordinate on specific aspects of the hunting and fishing plan to ensure safe and enjoyable recreational hunting opportunities.

3.9 Tribal Consultation

The Service mailed an invitation for comments to all Tribes potentially affected by initiating an EA to open the refuge to wild turkey hunting and to expand white-tailed deer archery hunting and sport fishing. The Service extended an invitation to engage in government-to-government consultation in accordance with Executive Order 13175.

3.10 Public Outreach

The refuge will make the public aware of the availability of the draft EA and hunting and fishing plan via public notices on the refuge’s Web site, through local newspapers, and in the refuge’s headquarters office. During a 30-day public comment period, the Service will accept comments in writing, in person, electronically, or in any other form the public wishes to present comments or information. Upon close of the comment period, all comments and information will be reviewed and considered. The final EA will address the comments submitted.

3.11 Determination

This section will be filled out upon completion of any public comment period and at the time of finalization of the EA.

- The Service’s action will not result in a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. See the attached “**Finding of No Significant Impact.**”
- The Service’s action **may significantly affect** the quality of the human environment and the Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

Preparer Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name/Title/Organization: _____

Reviewer Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name/Title: _____

3.12 References

Kuglin, T. 2018. Prolific turkey populations spread hunting opportunities across Montana. Independent Record. <https://helenair.com/lifestyles/recreation/prolific-turkey-populations-spread-hunting-opportunities-across-montana/article_fbee0872-8483-5e68-8e51-4246025273fd.html>

[MFWP] Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. 2018. Deer Harvest Estimates, 2018. <<https://myfwp.mt.gov/fwpPub/harvestReports>> accessed January 17, 2020.

[USFWS] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, Montana. Lakewood, CO: U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 204 pp. <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/refuges/completedPlanPDFs_F-L/lmc_ccp_all.pdf>

———. 2020a. Draft Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge Hunting and Fishing Plan. 15 pp. Stevensville, Montana. <<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php#>>

———. 2020b. Information for Planning and Consultation Database. <http://www.fws.gov/ipac/ipac_basics.html> accessed January 2020.

———. 2020c. Draft Compatibility Determination for Hunting on Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge. 5 pp. Stevensville, Montana. <<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish.php#>>

APPENDIX A OTHER APPLICABLE STATUTES, EXECUTIVE ORDERS, AND REGULATIONS

Statutes, Executive Orders, and Regulations
Cultural Resources
<p>American Indian Religious Freedom Act, as amended, 42 U.S. Code 1996–1996a; 43 CFR 7</p> <p>Antiquities Act of 1906, 16 U.S. Code 431-433; 43 CFR 3</p> <p>Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, 16 U.S. Code 470aa–470mm; 18 CFR 1312; 32 CFR 229; 36 CFR 296; 43 CFR 7</p> <p>National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, 16 U.S. Code 470–470x-6; 36 CFR 60, 63, 78, 79, 800, 801, and 810</p> <p>Paleontological Resources Protection Act, 16 U.S. Code 470aaa–470aaa-11</p> <p>Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 25 U.S. Code 3001–3013; 43 CFR 10</p> <p>Executive Order 11593 – Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment, 36 Federal Register 8921 (1971)</p> <p>Executive Order 13007 – Indian Sacred Sites, 61 Federal Register 26771 (1996)</p>
Fish and Wildlife
<p>Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, as amended, 16 U.S. Code 668–668c, 50 CFR 22</p> <p>Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, 16 U.S. Code 1531–1544; 36 CFR 13; 50 CFR 10, 17, 23, 81, 217, 222, 225, 402, and 450</p> <p>Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, 16 U.S. Code 742 a–m</p> <p>Lacey Act, as amended, 16 U.S. Code 3371 et seq.; 15 CFR 10, 11, 12, 14, 300, and 904</p> <p>Migratory Bird Treaty Act, as amended, 16 U.S. Code 703–712; 50 CFR 10, 12, 20, and 21</p> <p>Executive Order 13186 – Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds, 66 Federal Register 3853 (2001)</p>
Natural Resources
<p>Clean Air Act, as amended, 42 U.S. Code 7401–7671q; 40 CFR 23, 50, 51, 52, 58, 60, 61, 82, and 93; 48 CFR 23</p> <p>Wilderness Act, 16 U.S. Code 1131 et seq.</p> <p>Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, 16 U.S. Code 1271 et seq.</p> <p>Executive Order 13112 – Invasive Species, 64 Federal Register 6183 (1999)</p>
Water Resources
<p>Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, 16 U.S. Code 1451 et seq.; 15 CFR 923, 930, and 933</p> <p>Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 (commonly referred to as Clean Water Act), 33 U.S. Code 1251 et seq.; 33 CFR 320–330; 40 CFR 110, 112, 116, 117, 230-232, 323, and 328</p> <p>Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, as amended, 33 U.S. Code 401 et seq.; 33 CFR 114, 115, 116, 321, 322, and 333</p> <p>Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, 42 U.S. Code 300f et seq.; 40 CFR 141–148</p> <p>Executive Order 11988 – Floodplain Management, 42 Federal Register 26951 (1977)</p> <p>Executive Order 11990 – Protection of Wetlands, 42 Federal Register 26961 (1977)</p>

Key: CFR = Code of Federal Regulations; U.S.C. = United States Code